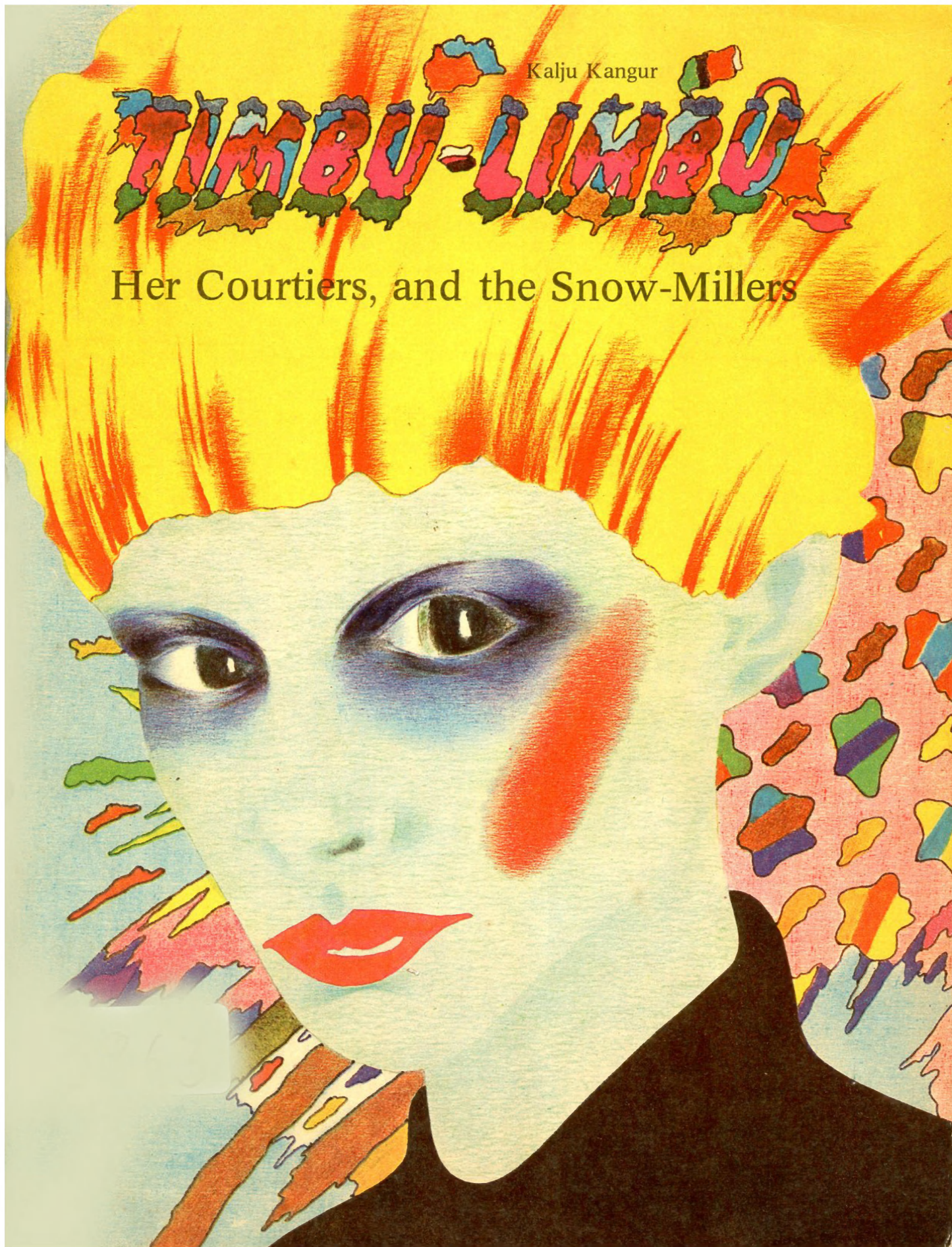


Kalju Kangur

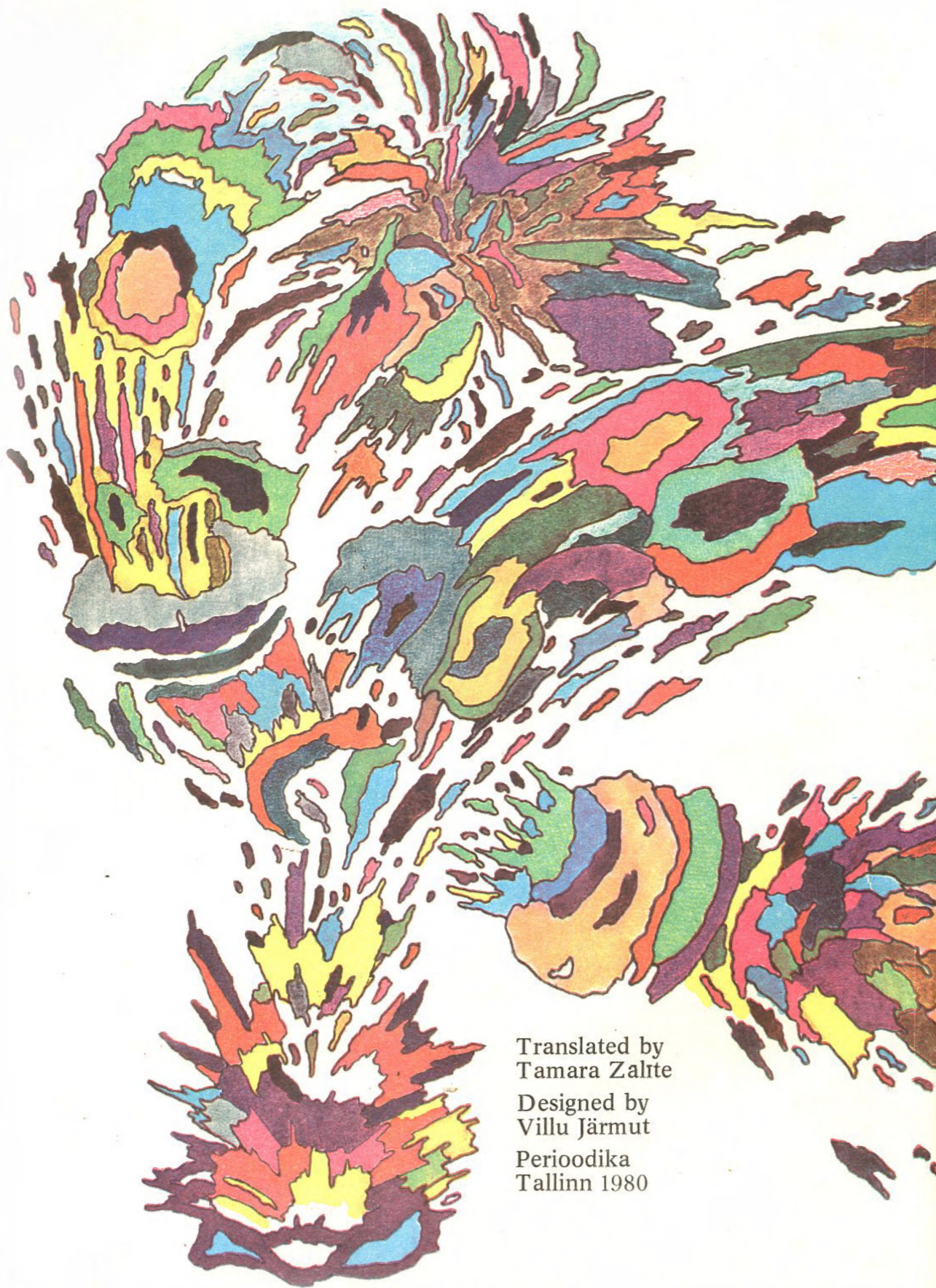
TIMBU-LIMBU

Her Courtiers, and the Snow-Millers









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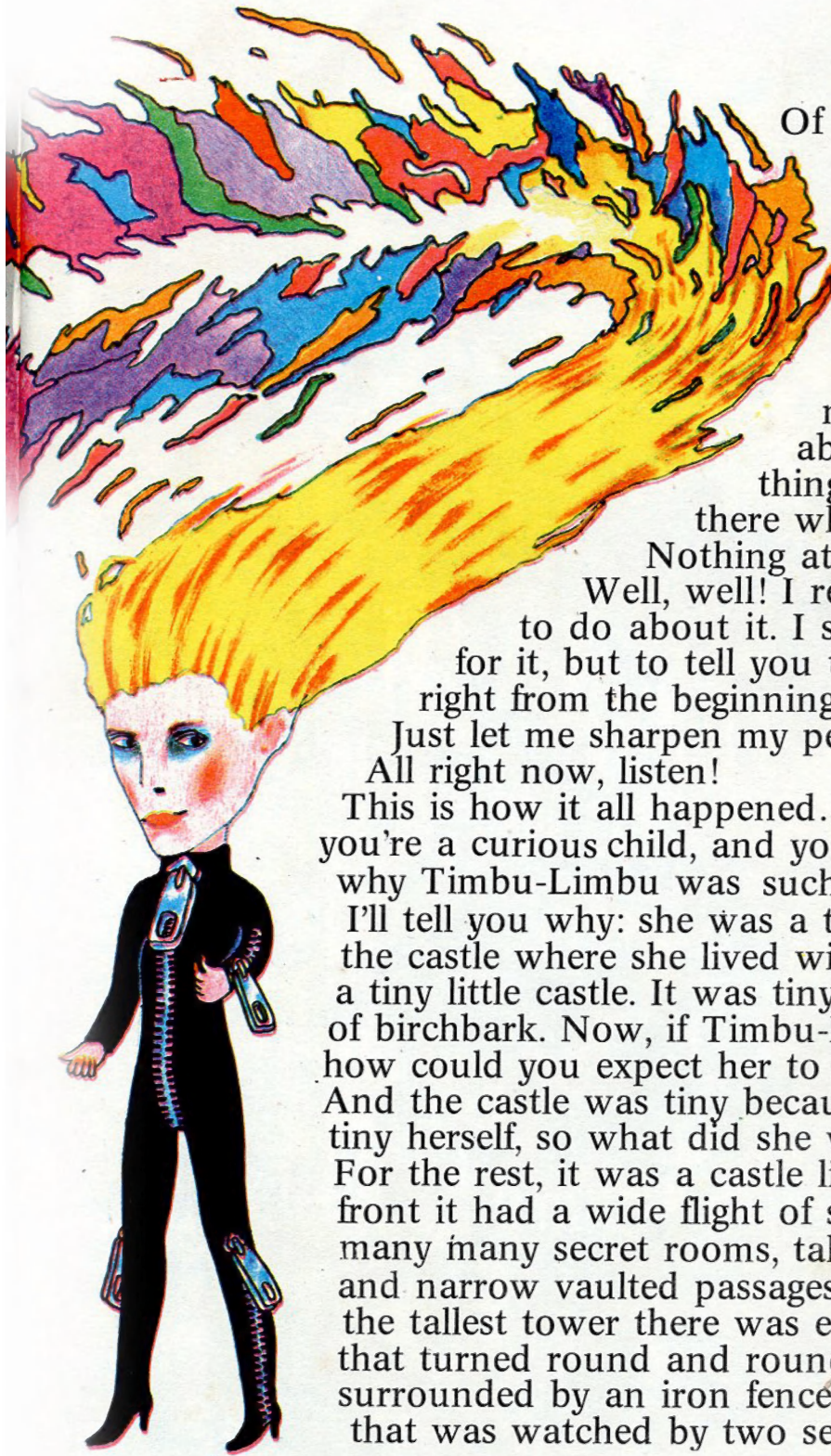


Her Courtiers, and the Snow-Millers



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Chapter 1



Of course, you must have heard about Timbu-Limbu, the tiny little doll who lives in a castle made of birchbark? You haven't?

Dear me! So you may know nothing about the amazing things that happened there when last winter came?

Nothing at all?

Well, well! I really can't think what to do about it. I suppose there's nothing for it, but to tell you the whole story right from the beginning.

Just let me sharpen my pencil...

All right now, listen!

This is how it all happened... But wait, maybe you're a curious child, and you'd like to know why Timbu-Limbu was such a tiny little thing?

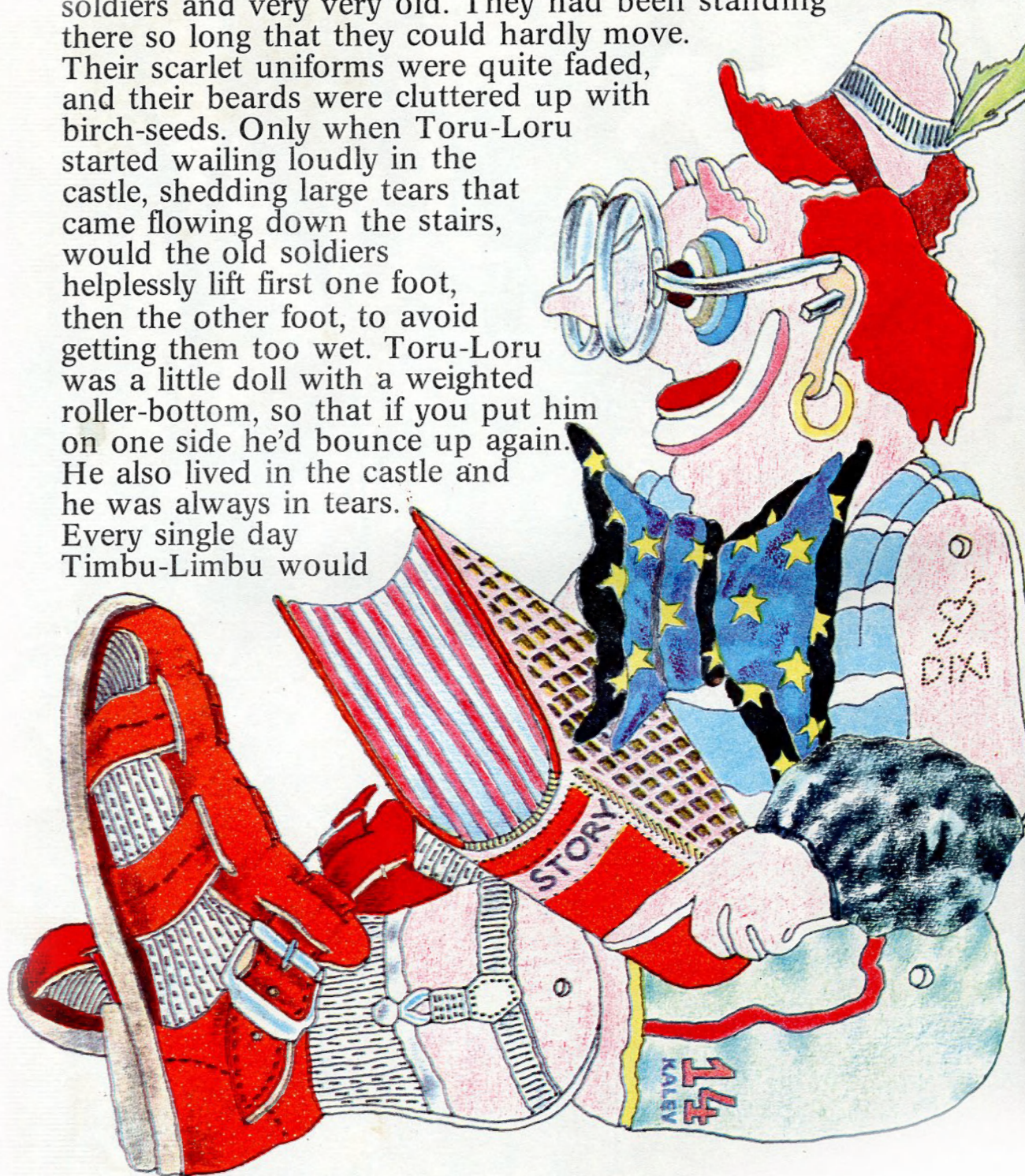
I'll tell you why: she was a tiny little thing because the castle where she lived with her friends was a tiny little castle. It was tiny, and it was made of birchbark. Now, if Timbu-Limbu were big, how could you expect her to get into it?

And the castle was tiny because Timbu-Limbu was tiny herself, so what did she want a big castle for? For the rest, it was a castle like any other castle: in front it had a wide flight of stairs, and there were many many secret rooms, tall turrets and towers, and narrow vaulted passages. And at the top of the tallest tower there was even a weather-cock that turned round and round. The castle was surrounded by an iron fence. It had a wide gate that was watched by two sentries. They were tin





soldiers and very very old. They had been standing there so long that they could hardly move. Their scarlet uniforms were quite faded, and their beards were cluttered up with birch-seeds. Only when Toru-Loru started wailing loudly in the castle, shedding large tears that came flowing down the stairs, would the old soldiers helplessly lift first one foot, then the other foot, to avoid getting them too wet. Toru-Loru was a little doll with a weighted roller-bottom, so that if you put him on one side he'd bounce up again. He also lived in the castle and he was always in tears. Every single day Timbu-Limbu would



wash out his forty-seven handkerchiefs and hang them out to dry on a line in the castle yard. Besides, there was Muki, the little mechanical dog, who lived with them, and Pambu, the black rubber boy. And then there was Pimpelsang. Pimpelsang was a highly educated wooden doll, and he was the chronicler of Birchbark Castle. He wore an enormous pair of spectacles, and carried a fat book suspended from a chain round his neck.

Into this book he would enter all the events that took place at the castle.

Everything would have been all right with Pimpelsang if not for one drawback

that I must mention straight away, in order not to forget it.

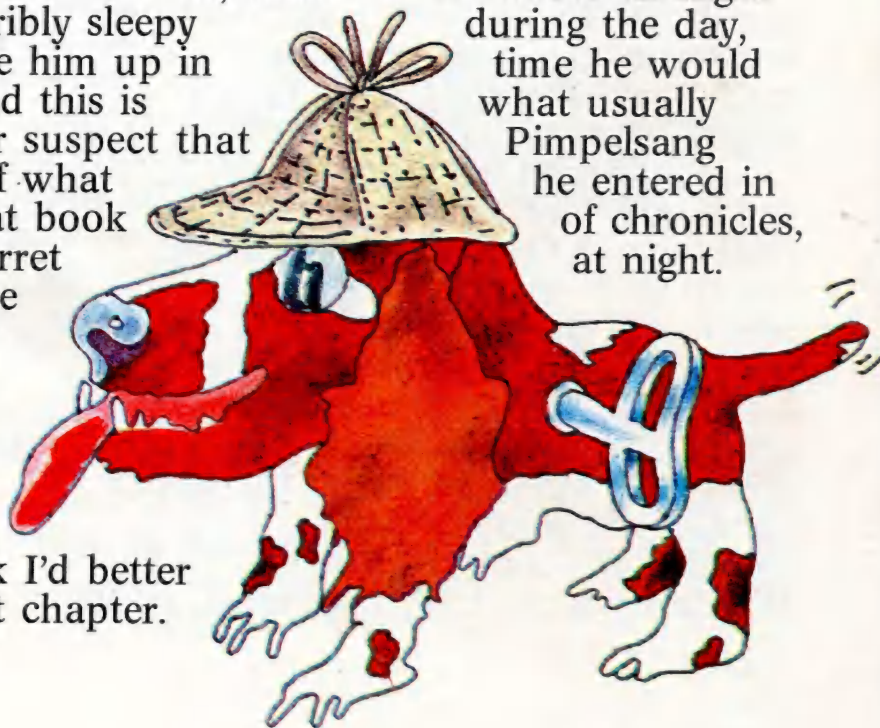
All through the long autumn nights he would sit up in his room in the tallest turret and write down what had happened during the day. You could always see the candlelight winking in the narrow little window. Well, since he wrote all night

long he would get terribly sleepy and if you didn't wake him up in miss all the events, and this is happened. So I rather suspect that invented quite a lot of what large letters into his fat book as he sat in his tall turret

There was nobody else living in the castle for the time being. Then one fine day

somebody else did appear. He was

quite an amazing stranger... But I think I'd better leave him for the next chapter.





forgot to tell you that Birchbark Castle stood on top of a little hill, and all around it grew tufts of horse-tail.

This little hill was at the foot of a mountain that was enormously high. This mountain was so very high that its top was almost invisible in the mist. On it was perched the Snow-Mill, the home of the three snow-millers — Koku, Oku, and Toku.

As soon as winter came, Koku, Oku, and Toku would set the snow-mill going.

Flake upon flake of snow would come floating down, falling thicker and thicker. The snow-flakes covered the roof of the castle, and the castle-yard, and piled up along the fence, and half buried the horse-tail

making it look like little snow-clad firs. By and by there would be plenty of slides and slopes. And oh!—the winter joys! Sleds, and skis, and snowmen... While indoors there was a crackling fire to come back to. However—this year everything went topsy-turvy. To start with, the snow simply wouldn't come. Something must have happened up there at the snow-mill. Now, what on earth could it be? One morning Pambu went out to open the shutters and found them tied fast with a thick cob-web. He had to go back and ask Timbu-Limbu for a kitchen-knife so that he could cut the cob-web. Pambu stood on the upper rung of the ladder saying:

"Winter has come, but there's no snow! Whatever could have happened to them?..."



"Happened to whom?" Timbu-Limbu asked in a frightened little voice. She was scrubbing the stairs and couldn't hear him very well. Time and time again she had to scrub the stairs. Because Muki could never remember to wipe all his chubby little paws on the outside doormat. But you couldn't really blame Muki—having four legs, he had just twice as many as anyone else. Small wonder he'd forget about some of them. Besides, Muki was always in a hurry. "What happened to whom?" Timbu-Limbu asked again when she had finished with the stairs.

"The snow-millers," Pambu said. He was gazing hard in the direction of the mountain-top that was almost invisible in the mist.

"What should have happened to them?"

Now Timbu-Limbu was beginning to feel worried too.

"I don't know. I only know that it's time for the snow-mill to be working. And it doesn't. So something must be wrong with them..." The rubber boy came bouncing down the steps and bounced up and down like a ball before he stopped.

"We'll have to go and see for ourselves," he said.

"To the top of the mountain, you mean? But it's awfully far..." Timbu-Limbu wrinkled up her forehead. "All right, but we'll go all together," she said. "We must talk to Pimpelsang. He always knows what's right."

They found Pimpelsang in his room. He was sitting in his armchair dozing. When Timbu-Limbu woke him up, Pimpelsang first took off his enormous spectacles and started wiping them with his handkerchief. Then, though he wasn't really quite awake yet, he felt for his pencil and opened the fat chronicle book.

By the time they had told him the whole story he was fully awake, and he shut the book and rose to his feet.

"We must start out at once!" he said briefly. He opened his wardrobe and began to pack his suitcase. Muki jumped with delight when he heard of the expedition, he jumped and jumped until his clockwork had run down and Timbu-Limbu had to wind him up again. Muki was very anxious to be wound up properly. Otherwise he wouldn't have the strength to reach the top of the mountain.

As usual, there was a little hitch over Toru-Loru.

"No-o-o-oh! I won't go-o-o-oh!" he wailed.

"Stay home if you like," said Timbu-Limbu.

"No-o-o-oh! I'll go-o-o-oh!" Toru-Loru bawled.

They started packing. Timbu-Limbu put Toru-Loru's forty-seven handkerchiefs into her own bag, just in case.

When they were finally gathered in the yard, all ready to start, they discovered that Pimpelsang was missing. Pambu found him in his turret. Pimpelsang was reclining in his armchair fast asleep, the suit-case balanced on his knees. Pambu shook him awake. Pimpelsang took off his spectacles, wiped them carefully, straightened the book that was suspended from the chain round his neck, and followed Pambu.

It was at this point that they noticed somebody approaching the castle-gate, and then all mouths fell open. The stranger was walking in the most curious way. He was marching towards them with his back turned foremost, face and toe-caps turned backward. When he reached the gate he stopped and they saw that he was made of tin.

"Good-bye!" he said politely. "Would you mind locking the gate, I'd like to enter!"

Chapter 3

Pambu the rubber boy was the first to find his wits. He bounced up to the gate and unlocked it. The tin boy marched into the yard, turned round-about and introduced himself:

"Trebla, globe-trotter."

Then he caught sight of the bags and suit-cases and asked in a tinny voice:

"Are you about to arrive from somewhere? I'd be most delighted to be in your way..."

Timbu-Limbu shrugged her shoulders helplessly and turned her puzzled eyes on Pimpelsang. Muki crept up to the tin boy and sniffed at his boots whose paint was all worn off.

"We're setting out on an expedition to visit the snow-millers."

Pimpelsang said. "There's something the matter with them."

Trebla's face broke into a radiant smile.

"I'd be most distressed if I could join you!"

Without another word he picked up the heaviest pack. It contained the tent and all their travel-kit. Trebla slung it across his back, but since he did it the other way round, it bumped slap against his stomach. Then with a wave of his hand he marched off, back forward, toe-caps backward.

His tin face looked friendly and gay, and they all followed him. When they were on the other side of the gate, Trebla pointed to the mountain-top and asked:

"Is that where the snow-millers live—down there?"

"High up there!" yelled Toru-Loru.

"Just as I thought,"

Trebla said cheerfully.

At this Toru-Loru broke into tears.

He fell behind, dragging his feet, grunting and whimpering, and rubbing his eyes with his fists.

On and on they walked following the path that kept losing itself among the trees. Higher and higher.

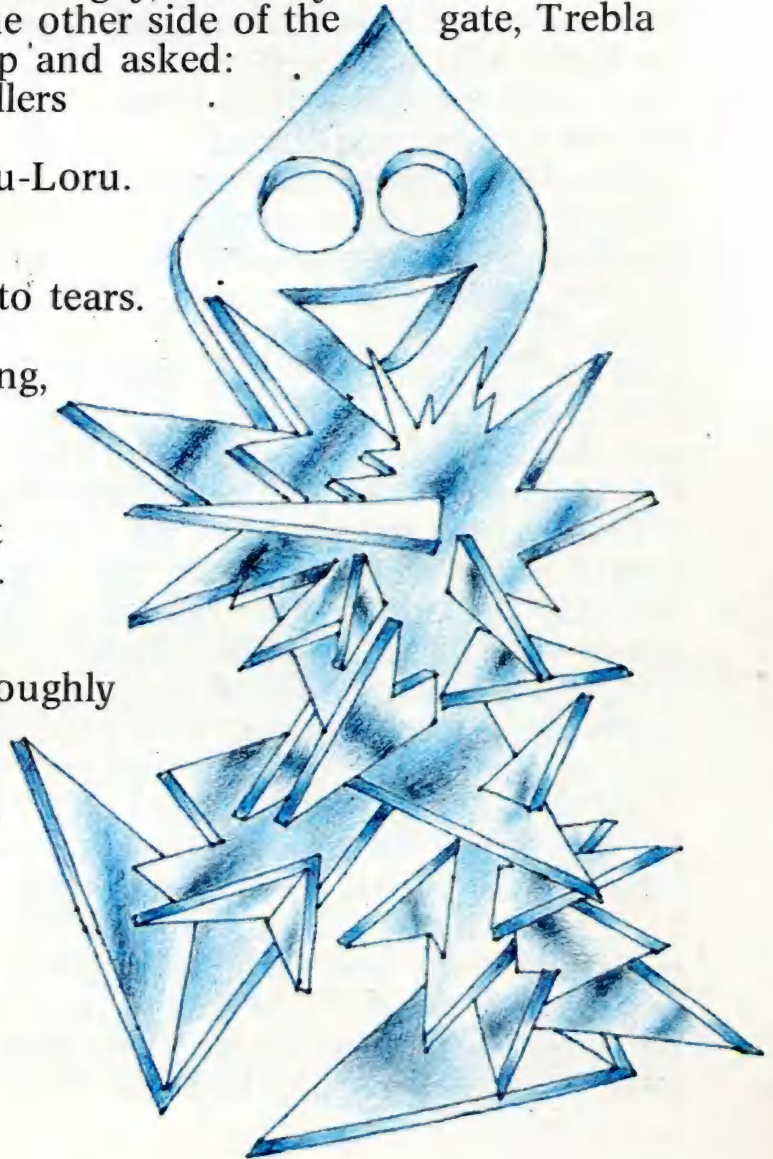
Muki was in the lead: they had wound him up so thoroughly that he couldn't stop.

Next came Trebla, back foremost, the pack bumping against his stomach.

The others followed.

At one of the turnings Timbu-Limbu whispered in Pimpelsang's ear:

"Don't you find our new friend rather queer?"



"Oh, there's nothing in particular," Pimpelsang replied.

"Nothing in particular."

"But didn't you notice the funny way he speaks?" Timbu-Limbu insisted.

"We all have our funny ways," Pimpelsang said. "You should take no notice."

"But he walks backwards!"

"Why shouldn't he?" Pimpelsang looked down at her from above his spectacles. "It isn't nice to discuss people behind their backs." Timbu-Limbu looked confused. "I'm not discussing him behind his back. All I said was..."

"We must pretend not to notice," said Pimpelsang dropping his voice. "He's our friend."

Timbu-Limbu gave him a smile.

"Oh, all right, I won't say another word. However..."

On and on and on they walked. The sandy forest path followed its own wilful way. It would dip into the shadows of trees, then suddenly appear again.

Nothing happened to spoil their first day. True, Pimpelsang who kept sitting down on stones to rest, fell asleep eight times, and they had to wake him. But Toru-Loru was so fascinated by the novelty of it all that he clean forgot to be a cry-baby.

When evening fell they pitched their tent under the trees.

Everybody was so exhausted that they fell asleep at once.

Nobody noticed Trebla crawl into the tent feet first and fall asleep with his feet on the pillow.

Only Pimpelsang collected some dry twigs and lit a beautiful camp-fire just outside the tent. He settled down in front of it, opened his book and began to write:

"TODAY WE STARTED OUT ON A LONG TRIP..."

He wrote and he wrote and he wrote all through the night, recalling the events of the day. From time to time he would stop to chew at his pencil and think—did he remember it all correctly? Had they really been attacked by a dragon with seven heads, or had he dreamt it when he dozed on a stone by the roadside? He wasn't very sure, so he wrote that the dragon who had attacked them that day had had only three heads.



Chapter 4

woke in the morning to Trebla's cheerful whistling.

Perched on a big fir-cone he was working away at something. He held his blanket by the end in one hand, and was flourishing a pair of scissors in the other.

"What are you doing?" Timbu-Limbu asked, rather frightened.

"My blanket's too short for me," Trebla answered politely.

"Too short?"

"Yes, my legs were sticking out all night. It's too short.

I'll have to cut off a strip to make it longer."

"Cut off a strip to make it longer?" Timbu-Limbu's eyes grew quite round with astonishment.

"One length will do," said Trebla, and whistling merrily, thrust his scissors into the blanket. The others looked bewildered. No one said a word. It was too confusing. Timbu-Limbu's eyes sought out Pimpelsang. But he was fast asleep after his night's work. Trebla the tin boy snipped a strip off his blanket, flung it aside, and said with the sweetest smile:

"I'm terribly full up, couldn't we have a bit of breakfast?"

They started preparing breakfast. Timbu-Limbu brought out a tin of plums and asked Trebla to open it while she saw to the coffee.

When he handed her the tin Timbu-Limbu cried out in amazement.

The tin was empty, and Trebla was biting heartily into the lid.

"Why, it's quite empty," Timbu-Limbu exclaimed.

"Yes, I emptied it out. We don't want the plums, do we?"

The tin isn't bad at all, you know. Though I'd have preferred it rather more bitter..." What a strange companion they'd picked up!

They looked at him reproachfully.

"What did you do it for?" Timbu-Limbu asked.

"It's nothing," he said, bashfully. "I'm always being praised,

I'm quite used to it." When breakfast was over,

they shook Pimpelsang awake and continued on their way.

Nobody could foresee what the day had in store for them. In the meantime they continued along the zig-zagging path that led ever upwards and upwards. In some places graceful ferns spread their crowns overhead like so many palm-trees. From time to time they would sit down to rest. The suggestion usually came from Trebla who was carrying the heaviest pack and who would say:

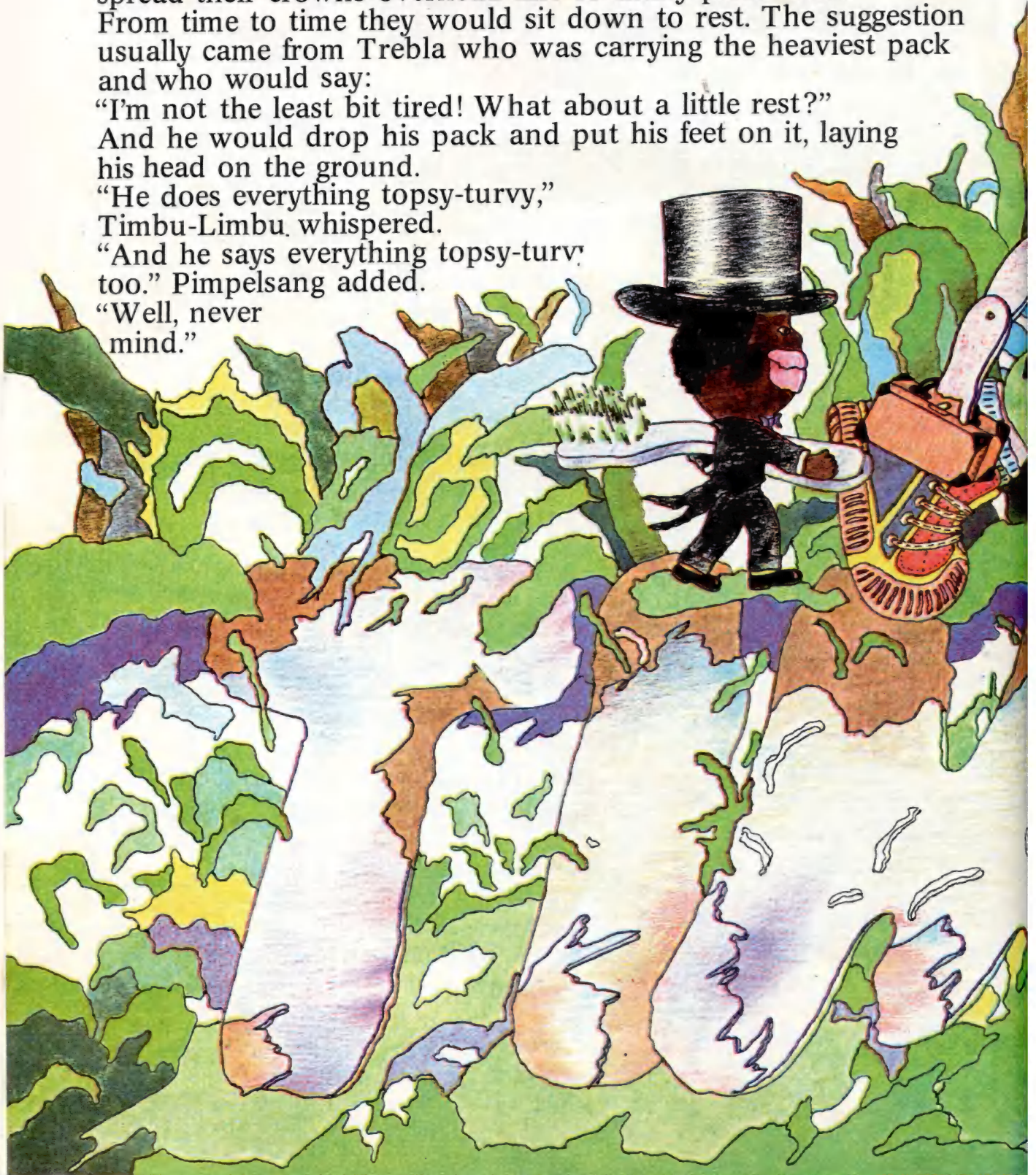
"I'm not the least bit tired! What about a little rest?"

And he would drop his pack and put his feet on it, laying his head on the ground.

"He does everything topsy-turvy," Timbu-Limbu whispered.

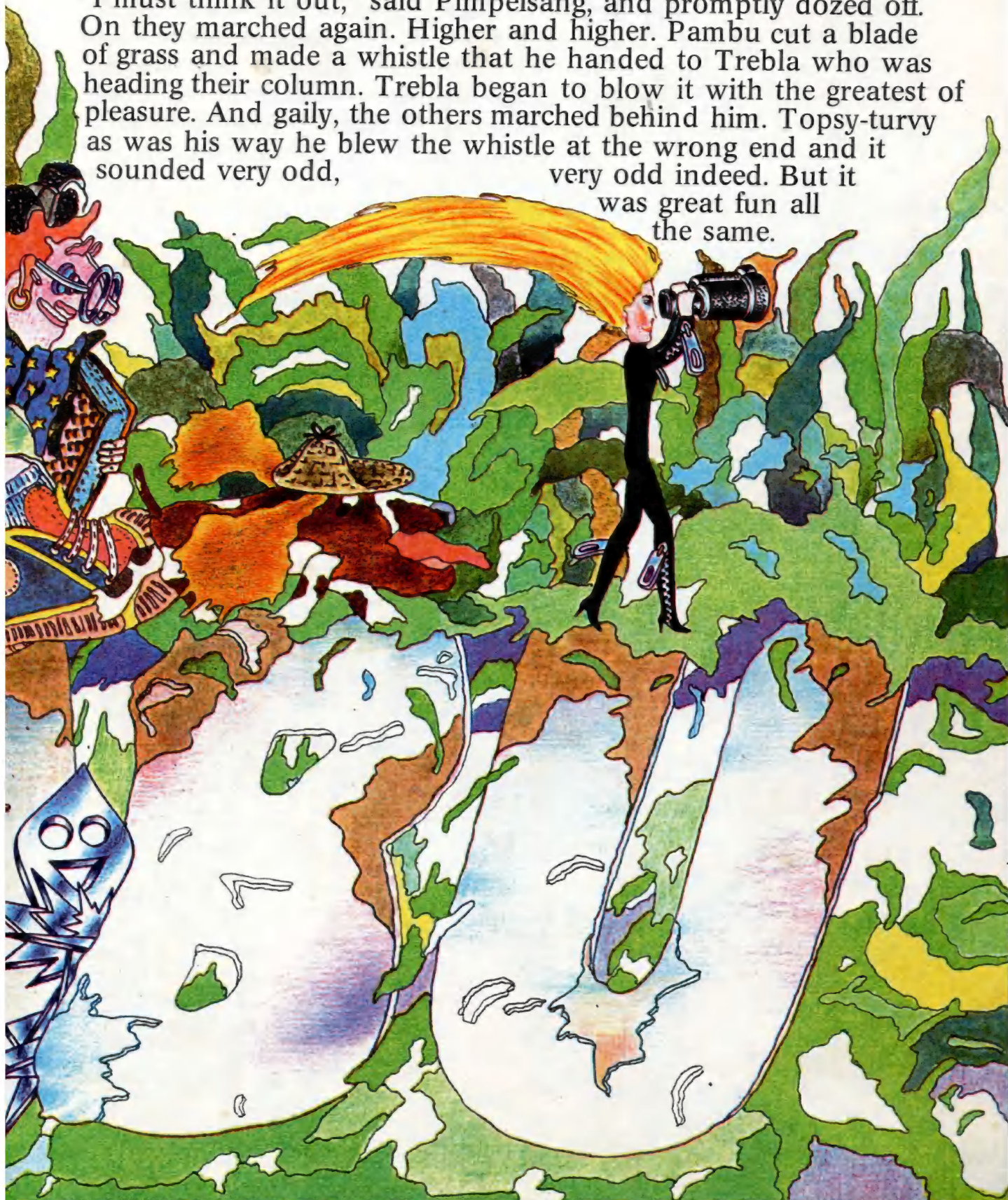
"And he says everything topsy-turvy too." Pimpelsang added.

"Well, never mind."



"Still, I wonder why?" Timbu-Limbu asked.

"I must think it out," said Pimpelsang, and promptly dozed off. On they marched again. Higher and higher. Pambu cut a blade of grass and made a whistle that he handed to Trebla who was heading their column. Trebla began to blow it with the greatest of pleasure. And gaily, the others marched behind him. Topsy-turvy as was his way he blew the whistle at the wrong end and it sounded very odd, very odd indeed. But it was great fun all the same.



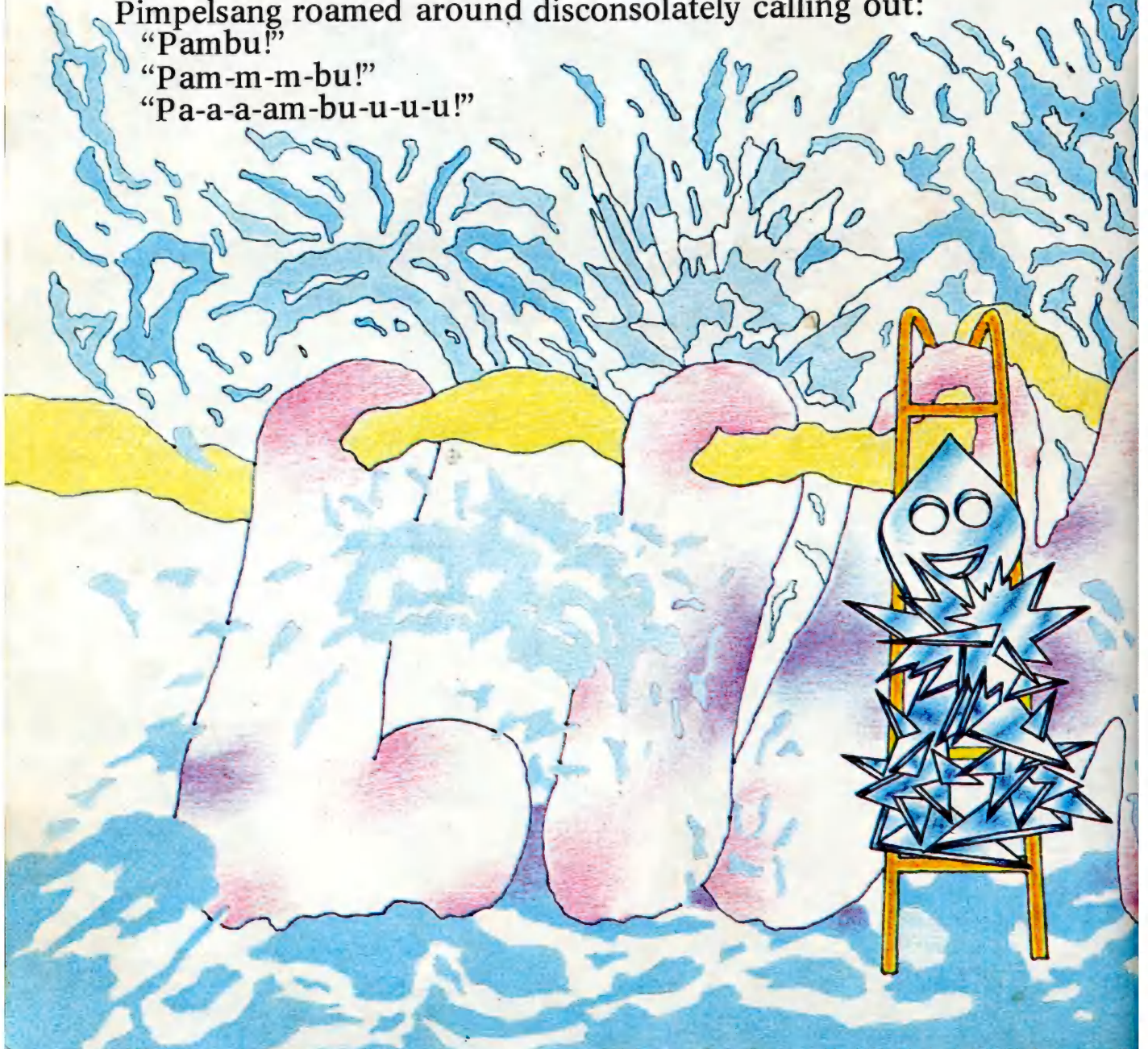
That evening Pambu the little black rubber boy disappeared without a trace. They had just settled themselves for the night, and Pambu had gone down to the river to brush his teeth. He never returned. They went out to look for him, but there was no Pambu. His footprints led almost to the very bank of the river and then stopped abruptly, as though he had vanished into thin air. There was only his little white toothbrush lying on the ground. Timbu-Limbu picked up the toothbrush and put it in her pocket. They were terribly upset. What could have happened to Pambu? Where was he?

Timbu-Limbu, Muki, Trebla, yes, even Toru-Loru and Pimpelsang roamed around disconsolately calling out:

"Pambu!"

"Pam-m-m-bu!"

"Pa-a-a-am-bu-u-u-u!"



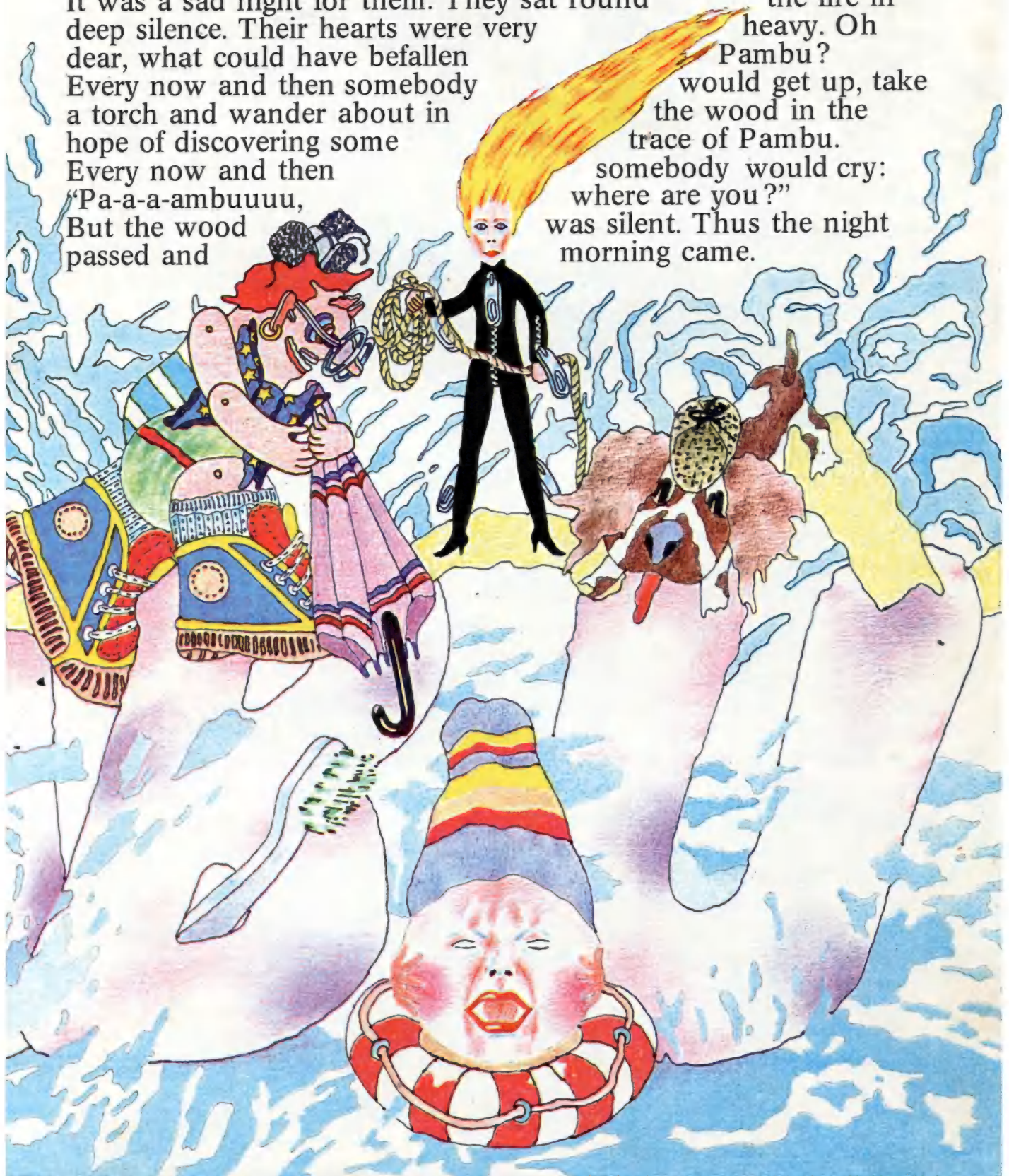
No reply. When it grew dark they lit torches and resumed their search. But it was no use. Pambu had vanished.

It was a sad night for them. They sat round the fire in deep silence. Their hearts were very heavy. Oh dear, what could have befallen Pambu?

Every now and then somebody would get up, take a torch and wander about in the wood in the hope of discovering some trace of Pambu.

Every now and then somebody would cry: "Pa-a-a-ambuuuu, where are you?"

But the wood was silent. Thus the night passed and morning came.





the morning
they resumed
their search with
great energy.
"He may have
only lost his way,"
Timbu-Limbu ventured,
to comfort herself
and her friends.

Muki sniffed at every bush far and wide. Sometimes he disappeared for quite a while. Then he flashed into sight, only to disappear again. Presently they saw him darting full speed towards them. Clouds of pine-needles shot up from under his paws. He seemed in a desperate hurry. His tongue was lolling out, his eyes popping from their sockets.

The moment he reached them he gasped:

"A huge... flu... flu..."

And he stopped stock-still and mute. His clockwork had run down.

"The key! Where's the key?" Timbu-Limbu cried.

They fell to looking for the key. It was nowhere.

Timbu-Limbu turned from one to the other, asking imploringly:

"Didn't you wind up Muki last night?"

No one remembered. Toru-Loru thought it must have been Pimpel-sang. Pimpelsang thought it must have been Timbu-Limbu.

What now? They simply had to know what it was Muki wanted to tell them! Why had he been in such a hurry? Had he come upon Pambu's traces? Was Pambu in danger?

But Muki was standing there, mute and motionless, and his key was gone. They were in an awful flurry, dashing here, dashing there.

And then Trebla suddenly remembered having picked up some strange object of tin. He had put it in his mouth to taste it...

Trebla opened his mouth. Muki's key fell out with a clang.

Poor Trebla, he did look so sheepish, stepping from foot to foot, feeling terribly ashamed of himself!

Timbu-Limbu snatched up the key and began to wind up Muki. The spring had run down completely, so it took her quite a long time. At last Muki gave a little jerk, then a leap, and then he opened his jaws:



"Flu-flu... There's a fluffy animal under a bush! Enormous!"

"Maybe he's carried off Pambu?"

Timbu-Limbu cried. They woke Pimpelsang and set out on their way. Muki was in the lead. It took them a very long time to reach the bush. The enormous fluffy animal was still sitting there.

"Why, it's a little bear!" said Timbu-Limbu feeling much relieved.

"Good morning, Bear," she said. "Didn't you see a boy pass by?"

"Morning!" the bear grunted.

"I don't think I did."

But maybe I did... and maybe I didn't... I'm too sleepy to remember..."

"Was he a rubber boy?" Timbu-Limbu asked.

"Maybe he was a rubber boy," the bear grunted. "And maybe he was a paper boy... I'm too sleepy to remember..."



"Was he black?"

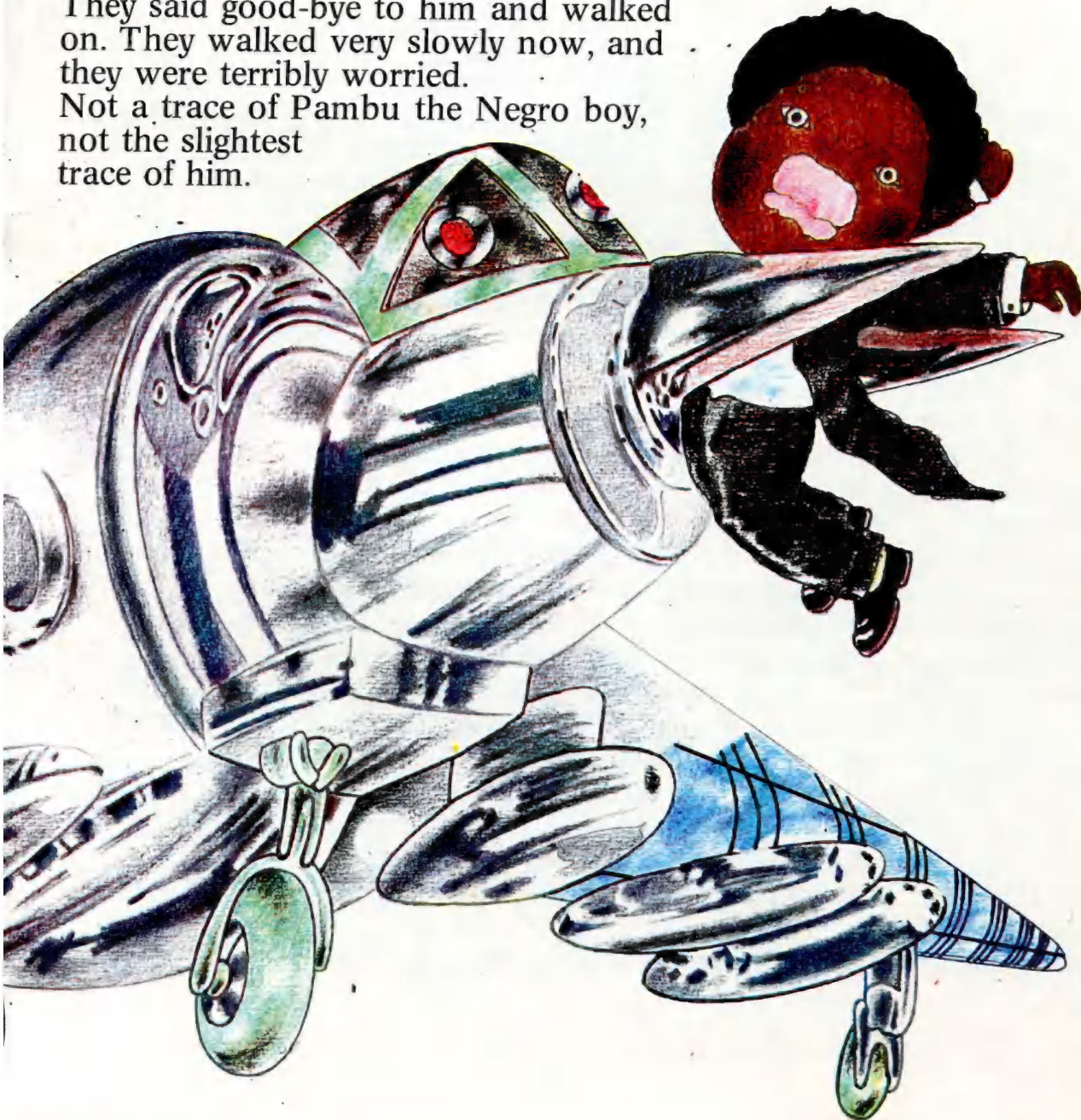
"Yes, I think he was black," the bear replied. "But he may have been white... I'm too sleepy to remember..."

"Was it yesterday you saw him?" Timbu-Limbu persisted.

"Maybe it was, maybe it was," the bear yawned. "But it may have been the day after tomorrow... I'm too sleepy to remember... No snow, no snow. And I'm so awfully sleepy... How can I sleep if there's no snow..."

They said good-bye to him and walked on. They walked very slowly now, and they were terribly worried.

Not a trace of Pambu the Negro boy, not the slightest trace of him.



The path wound its way up the mountain. It kept losing itself among the trees and emerging again. They moved on in single file. Ever more frequently they would sit down to rest. Not because they were tired. Oh no, they simply hated to leave the place where they had lost their friend Pambu.

Alas, they had to go on, though it saddened them deeply.

They reached a sharp turn and again they sat down to rest, when all of a sudden they heard a strange noise behind them. It was far away as yet, but it was coming closer. It sounded like somebody running after them. They looked at each other in fright. Trebla rose to his feet and planted himself right across the path ready to receive battle. But as usual, he did it topsy-turvy, back forward. Meanwhile the strange noise was coming closer and closer.

Somebody seemed in a hurry. He was only a few turnings away. Trebla struck a menacing attitude.

And then—Pambu! Pambu appeared!

"Hallo!"-he said cheerfully. "I found your traces, I knew I'd catch you up..."

Their joy knew no limits.

They gathered about Pambu. They wanted to make sure it was really Pambu. Yes, it was! It was! It was Pambu, safe and sound. They joined hands and started dancing round and round. Faster and faster. All except Pimpelsang—Pimpelsang had once again fallen asleep.

When they had romped their fill, they collected their things and continued up the mountain. Pambu started telling his story: So he'd almost reached the river where he'd wanted to brush his teeth when an enormous magpie had swooped down upon him and snatched him up before he could utter as much as a sound. For a long time she had flown about the wood with him and finally she had plumped him down in her nest on the very top of a tall pine.

There the magpie had said, with a vicious little chuckle:

"I'm not really hungry just now. A little while ago I finished off a mouse. I think I'll keep you for tomorrow's breakfast."

All through the night the magpie had sat watching over him, never closing an eye.

At break of day she had said with a wide yawn:

"And now, my little boy, I'm going to eat you!"
"Do! Do!" Pambu had said. A brilliant idea had struck him.
He knew magpies were awfully eager for pray. So he'd said:
"What a shame I dropped my toothbrush. It would have added
to your breakfast."



A gleam of greedy anticipation had come to the magpie's eyes.
"Where? Where did you drop it?"

"On the river bank."

Off flew old Greedy Guts, down jumped Pambu.

He'd had to run a very long way before he'd struck the path on which he'd found the footprints of his friends.

Pambu was still describing his adventure when they reached the hedgehog's home that stood quite close to the top of the mountain.

Hedgehog was standing on the threshold muttering something under his breath.

"Oh, hallo, Hedgehog!" said Timbu-Limbu. "Why aren't you asleep? Winter is sleeping time for hedgehogs!"

Hedgehog grunted even more furiously.

"Why indeed!" he finally muttered. "As though anybody could sleep when there's no snow! The moment you curl up for sleep you get so cold that you've got to crawl out again! And all because of that witch, horrid old thing!"

"A witch?" Timbu-Limbu asked incredulously.

"That's what I said. I saw it all with my own eyes," Hedgehog grunted. "Saw what?" the travellers exclaimed in one voice.

"Saw her fly to the snow-mill one night, her scarlet skirts flapping. I'm sure she was up to some mischief, taking a magic potion or something to the snow-millers."

"A real proper witch?" Toru-Loru was so scared he almost burst out crying.

"Why, certainly," Hedgehog growled.

"Riding a broomstick?" Timbu-Limbu wanted to make sure.

"Broomstick my foot," Hedgehog muttered contemptuously.

"Where d'you folks come from, anyway?"

"Birchbark Castle," Pambu said courteously.

"I might have guessed that much..." Hedgehog gave about a dozen snorts, and the travellers were afraid he wouldn't utter another word. "It's more than twenty years since witches last rode a broomstick," he finally muttered. "Didn't you know?"

"Indeed not," Timbu-Limbu confessed. "What do they ride now?"

"Vacuum cleaners, of course," Hedgehog said. "What else should they ride? Always vacuum-cleaners. They whirr and buzz as they fly..."



Chapter 8

following morning the enormous snow-mill came into view. Its heavy walls would

appear and disappear between the tree-trunks. The huge wings seemed frozen still. The travellers had almost reached their destination. However, that last day all but spoilt the whole venture. This is how it happened.

Muki discovered a mouse-hole by the roadside. He couldn't resist digging there, so he poked his nose inside the hole, and almost immediately chunks of earth came flying up from under his hind legs. He was digging for all he was worth and presently he was halfway inside the hole. He gave a sniff and a snort and resumed his digging with great gusto.

When the quivering tip of his tail was all there was to be seen of him, Muki realised that he'd made a mistake. It wasn't a mouse-hole at all. He was rather embarrassed and came slinking back.

But dear me!—what a sight he looked!

His fur was all tangled and he was matted with earth. His nose rather resembled a painter's brush dipped in mud.

Timbu-Limbu wrung her hands in despair.

"We can't go on before we've given Muki a proper scrubbing," she said. So they lit a camp-fire and fetched some water from a spring. Muki was feeling very guilty. So he kept ever so quiet while he was being scrubbed, blinking his eyes shamefacedly. To tell the truth, it was rather a pleasant experience. First Timbu-Limbu lathered his fur, and then she rinsed it with clean water. Muki hadn't been so clean for a long, long time. Now only his muzzle remained to be washed. Timbu-Limbu had left this till the very last. She took a cake of blue soap and soaped Muki's head. Everything went all right until some of the lather got into Muki's nostrils and he gave a sneeze. Goodness gracious me!

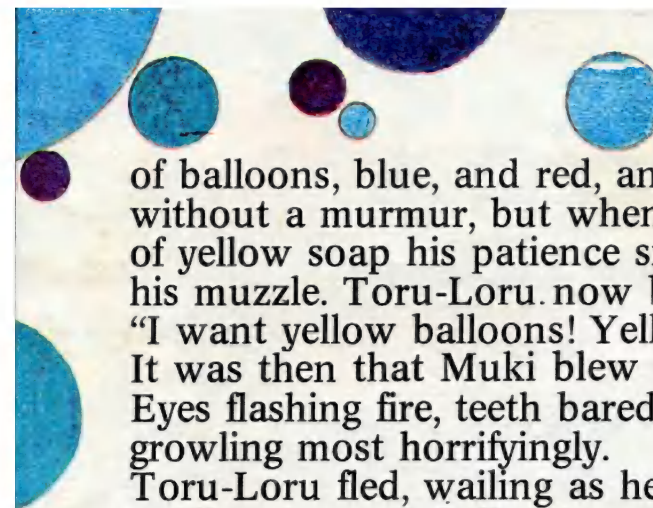
As soon as he sneezed little blue bubbles rose from his nostrils



like blue balloons.
The harder
he sneezed
the more balloons
went up into the air, all blue,
because the soap was blue.
Toru-Loru, who had been
watching the whole scrubbing
procedure suddenly had a
naughty idea, and he said to
Timbu-Limbu very innocently:
"You must be tired...
let me wash Muki's
muzzle for you."

Timbu-Limbu was rather
surprised, but since Muki
was almost clean she agreed
and went off; she really
had plenty of things to see to.
Toru-Loru found a cake of

red soap and lathered Muki's muzzle
with it. Needless to say, some of the lather got into Muki's nose
and Muki gave a sneeze, and now red balloons rose up into the air.
Quickly Toru-Loru fetched some green soap and started all over
again. Muki sneezed and sneezed and sneezed, and the sky was full



of balloons, blue, and red, and green. So far Muki had stood it without a murmur, but when Toru-Loru came running with a piece of yellow soap his patience snapped. At first he merely turned away his muzzle. Toru-Loru now began to howl:

"I want yellow balloons! Yellow balloo-oo-oons!"

It was then that Muki blew up in all earnest.

Eyes flashing fire, teeth bared, he dashed after Toru-Loru, growling most horrifyingly.

Toru-Loru fled, wailing as he did so:

"Yellow-ow-ow! Yellow-ow-ow!"

It was a breath-taking chase, and it started up a real whirlwind:

Trebla, Pambu, Timbu-Limbu, and even drowsy old Pimpelsang were all swept off their feet. Packs and suitcases somersaulted across the camp, emptying themselves of their contents. Some things went whirling through the air, and others rolled rattling down the slope, some of them breaking to pieces in their fall.

So great was Muki's fury.

Thank goodness, it never lasted long. Suddenly he stopped and sat back on his haunches as though nothing had happened. His scattered friends picked themselves up from the ground.

Now it was Toru-Loru's turn to let himself go.

"Want to go ho-o-ome! Ho-o-ome!" he bawled and proceeded to climb down the slope.

Timbu-Limbu rushed after him. But the naughty thing took no heed of her and continued running downhill, yelling:

"Ho-o-o-ome!"

And this so close to the mill! They couldn't let Toru-Loru go off by himself. He might lose his way. Besides, there was the magpie to think of. But to turn back now!

It was Trebla who saved the situation.

He rapped out in his tinny voice:

"Let's all go home! Home!"

Everybody stopped and gazed at him in utter amazement, including Toru-Loru.

"No-o-o-oh! I won't go-o-o-oh!" he shrieked and rejoined his friends. And so they could resume their climb, heading straight for the enormous wings of the snow-mill.





The mill was indeed enormous. Its grey stone tower went right through the clouds. When the travellers entered the gateway and stepped into the vaulted passage they felt incredibly tiny. The snow-mill yard was very silent and deserted. No one seemed to have walked there for a long time.

What could have happened to the snow-millers?

All the doors were wide open, yet there was nobody in sight.

"Hallo, snow-millers!" Timbu-Limbu cried.

"Hey, Koku! Hey, Toku! Hey, Oku!" Pambu cried.

"Where are you?" they shouted in unison.

Not a sound. Only the empty walls echoed back their voices.

Muki sniffed his way through the yard and discovered a great big boulder that somebody had rolled up in front of the cellar door. The others came along to see it.

Timbu-Limbu went up to the grated cellar window and tried to peer inside through the thick cob-webs.

"Here! Come quick!" she cried.

There were three beds in the cellar, and on each lay one of the snow-millers fast asleep. Koku, Oku, and Toku... But goodness, how awfully changed! Why, you couldn't recognize them. They had been sleeping for such a long time that their beards had spread thick and shaggy all over their faces, leaving only the eyes and the tips of their noses free.

"It's the witch's handiwork," Timbu-Limbu said with pity in her voice. "Poor old snow-millers!"

They started knocking at the window. First gently and timidly. Then louder and louder.

It was no use. The snow-millers never stirred in their sleep.

Timbu-Limbu was the first to guess the reason:

"They're bewitched!"

Quickly, she woke Pimpelsang who was dozing by the threshold, and asked him what to do. Pimpelsang wiped his enormous spectacles, put them on again, and sank into thought.

Presently he rose to his feet, pointed at the boulder by the door, and said: "It is bewitched. The millers are going to sleep as long as this stone is outside the door. The moment we roll it away they'll wake."

"Roll it away, indeed!" Timbu-Limbu cried with annoyance.

"Why, even seven men couldn't move it an inch!"

"No other way!" Pimpelsang murmured and dozed off again.

They examined the stone from all sides, they tried to push it, but all to no avail. The stone seemed rooted to the ground.

They had almost lost hope when Muki had a bright idea.

"If we dig a large hole right next to the stone," he said,

"it will roll over and drop inside it."

They got working without further delay. Muki laboured harder than anybody. Big chunks of earth came flying up from under his paws, and scattered in all directions. Trebla wasn't getting along so well. He was holding his spade the wrong way round.

After a while the stone began to move. They leaped to one side.

Slowly, very slowly the stone was shifting away from the door, and then it dropped straight into the hole.

And what do you know! Koku, Oku, and Toku immediately began to stir awake. They rubbed their eyes sleepily, they yawned most heartily, they looked about them terribly bewildered.

"Hey, Koku! Hey, Toku! Hey, Oku!" Timbu-Limbu cried. "Come on, get up, winter has been here ever so long! You must get your snow-mill started! Make haste!"

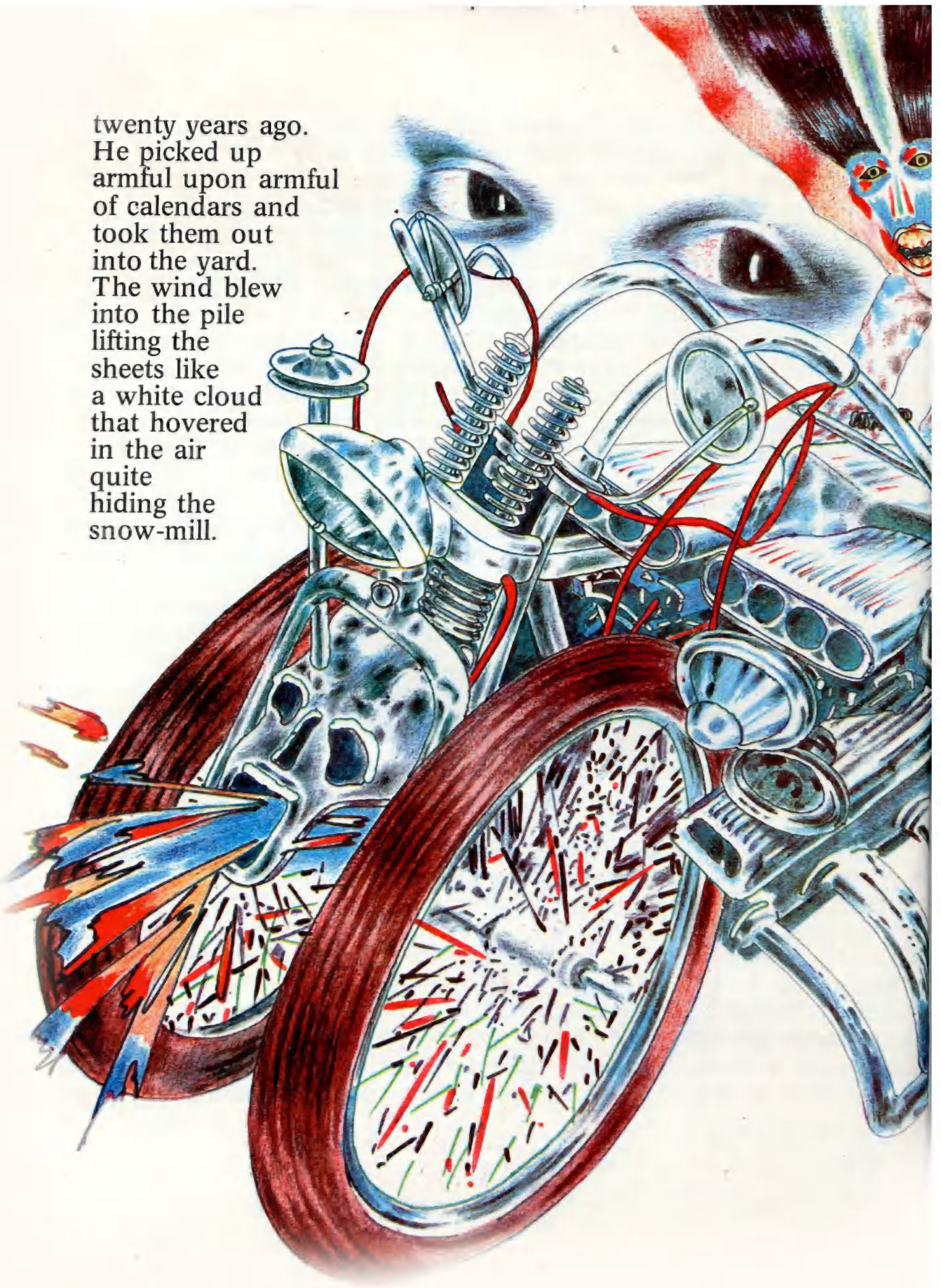
The snow-millers leaped out of their beds and began to hurry and scurry. It all came back to them. Phew, what a long sleep they'd had!

As they were getting things fixed they told their story. Once on a summer night the witch had appeared at their mill. She had demanded that they should start it working at once, in the middle of summer! What a thing to ask! It would have killed every flower and every living creature far and wide. So they had refused. The witch had got into a terrible rage. She had locked them up in the cellar and rolled up the magic stone to block the door.

This was why they had slept and slept, and if the friends hadn't arrived they'd have gone on sleeping and sleeping, who knows for how long...

Toku, the third snow-miller, hurried into the shed and began to rummage through a pile of old calendars. He wanted to find out the time of year. He found calendars of the previous year, and calendars of the year before, and of ten years ago, and of

twenty years ago.
He picked up
armful upon armful
of calendars and
took them out
into the yard.
The wind blew
into the pile
lifting the
sheets like
a white cloud
that hovered
in the air
quite
hiding the
snow-mill.





Poor Toku!
He was all mixed
up after that
long sleep!

Timbu-Limbu was
standing by Muki's side when
all of a sudden she heard
a strange noise, something rather
like a growl. She nudged Muki.

"Stop growling!" she said. "It's rude!"

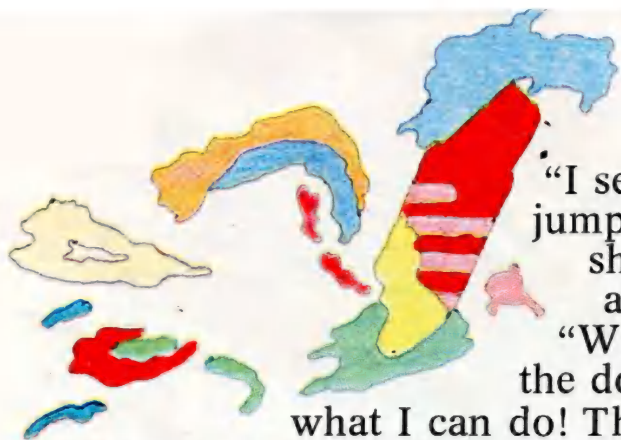
"But I'm not growling!" said Muki.

And he really wasn't, but the weird noise
was very distinct now, like a whirr and
a buzz. Louder and louder, closer and closer,
until it was right overhead.

Something scarlet flashed through the air. Then
they saw long strands of raven hair waving in the
wind. Finally, a vacuum cleaner descended upon
the snow-mill yard.

It had four wheels, and it was straddled by a witch with
tousled black hair, and wearing a loose scarlet gown.

"I see! So that's it!" she wheezed.



"I see!" the witch screeched as she jumped off the vacuum cleaner. Then she started hopping and skipping about in a rage and shrieked:

"Who dared to remove the stone from the door? You just wait and I'll show you what I can do! This will be the real thing! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

The witch rolled her eyes, stamped her feet, and croaked:

"I shall turn you into mice... I shall turn you into lice... I shall turn you into rats... I shall turn you into bats... I shall turn you into snakes... I shall turn you into stakes... I shall turn you into sticks... you'll soon suffer for your tricks..."

The friends stood trembling with fright. The tips of Koku's, Oku's and Toku's noses turned purple. But even they were helpless. Indeed, what on earth could they do?

The noise woke Pimpelsang. He knew nothing of what had happened. Very calmly, he took off his spectacles and started wiping them. His short-sighted eyes were screwed up and he stared straight at the witch. The cheek of it!

The witch was dumbfounded by such insolence. She gave a gasp and flew into the wildest of wild rages.

At this point they noticed Trebla moving slowly backwards closer and closer to the witch. She was standing at the very mouth of the vacuum cleaner.

A little jerk, and Trebla had switched on the motor. The witch flailed the air with her arms. Her long hair and wide skirts were flapping wildly. She struggled and writhed and swayed until—swish!—the vacuum cleaner had sucked her in.

Up rushed the snow-millers and shoved the vacuum cleaner off the top of the mountain. Down and down, faster and faster it rolled, until it disappeared in a cloud of blue smoke that remained hovering above the mountain slope for quite a while before it vanished completely. Not a trace remained of either the witch or her vacuum cleaner.

When the friends finally recovered from their astonishment and turned round, they cried out with horror. The powerful gust of air from the vacuum cleaner had flung Trebla on to the steps of





in its place
side. Trebla's
"Trebla! Trebla!"

"How are you
"Thanks awfully,
he said. "But
Trebla?"
Trebla?"

cried. "Don't
who you are?"
to his feet and
"My name's

And he took a few
way. He no longer walked
Now, wasn't it a real miracle?

the Wise fell into a deep meditation.
in Timbu-Limbu's ear: "Let's pretend
I know what it is. The people who made him
put in the wheel the wrong way. That's way he did everything

the snow-mill. There
he lay motionless. His
side was split open,
and a tiny little
cog-wheel had
dropped out of
his body.

Alas.

Alas, poor Trebla!
Pimpelsang picked
up the little wheel and
examined it through his
enormous spectacles,
murmuring to himself:

"It could perhaps
be re-inserted...

The question is: how? ...
Hmm! Now, let us see..."

He put the wheel
and closed Trebla's tin
eyes opened slowly.
cried Timbu-Limbu.
feeling?"

I'm very well indeed!"
why do you call me

"Well, aren't you
Timbu-Limbu

you remember

The tin boy got
shook his head.

Albert," he said.
steps—the right
back to front!

Pimpelsang

Then he whispered
not to notice!



topsy-turvy. And he pronounced his name backwards. If you read Albert backwards you get Trebla, don't you see?" "Why, yes, of course!"

cried Timbu-Limbu. "Oh, isn't it nice to have him behave like everybody else?"

Albert was walking about the yard of the snow-mill. The toe caps of his boots were pointing forward, the heels backward, just like everybody else's.

The snow-millers were in a frantic hurry.

They were making their final

preparations to get the mill going.

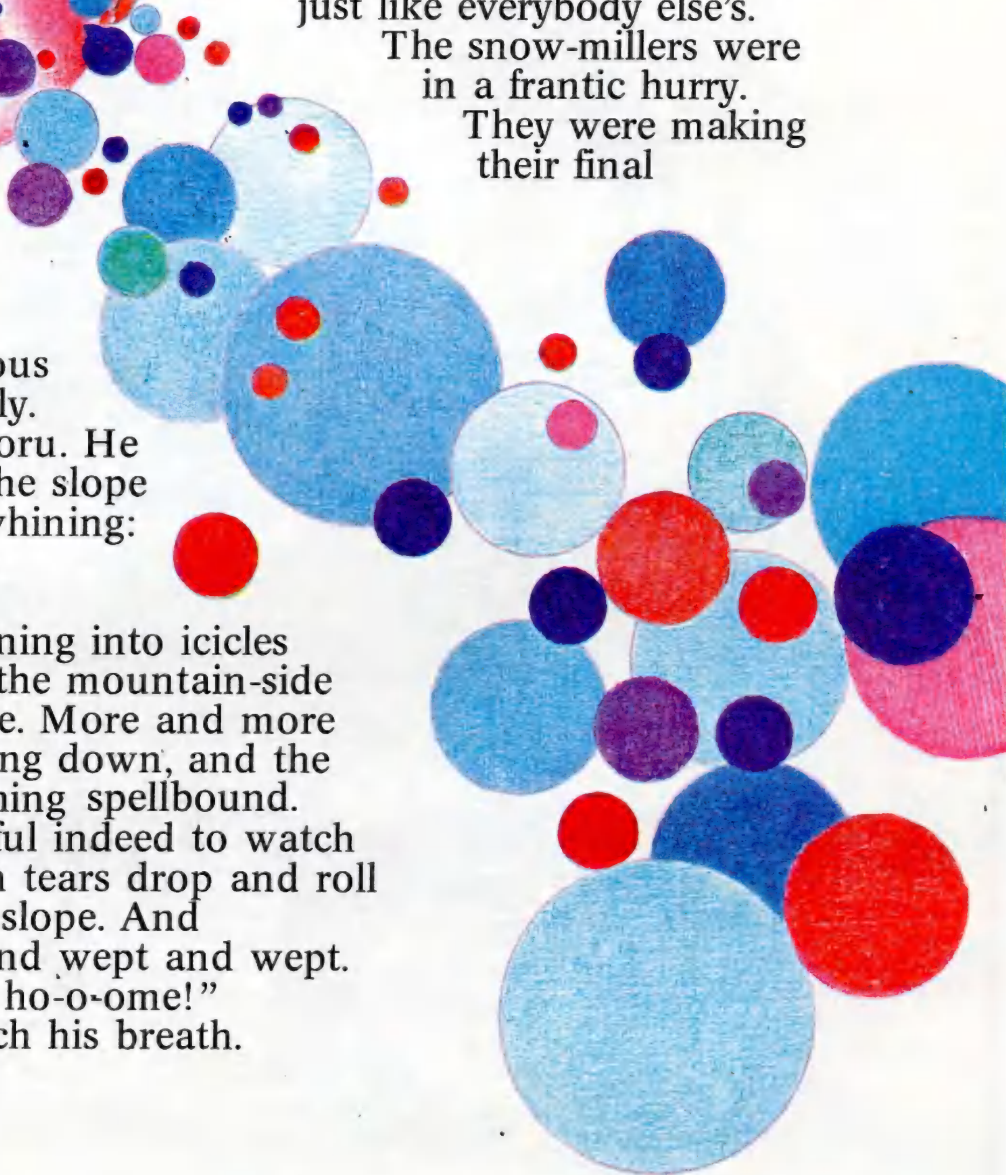
It was growing cold. The friends were terribly anxious to get home quickly.

All except Toru-Loru. He was standing on the slope of the mountain whining: "Don't-want-to-go ho-o-ome!"

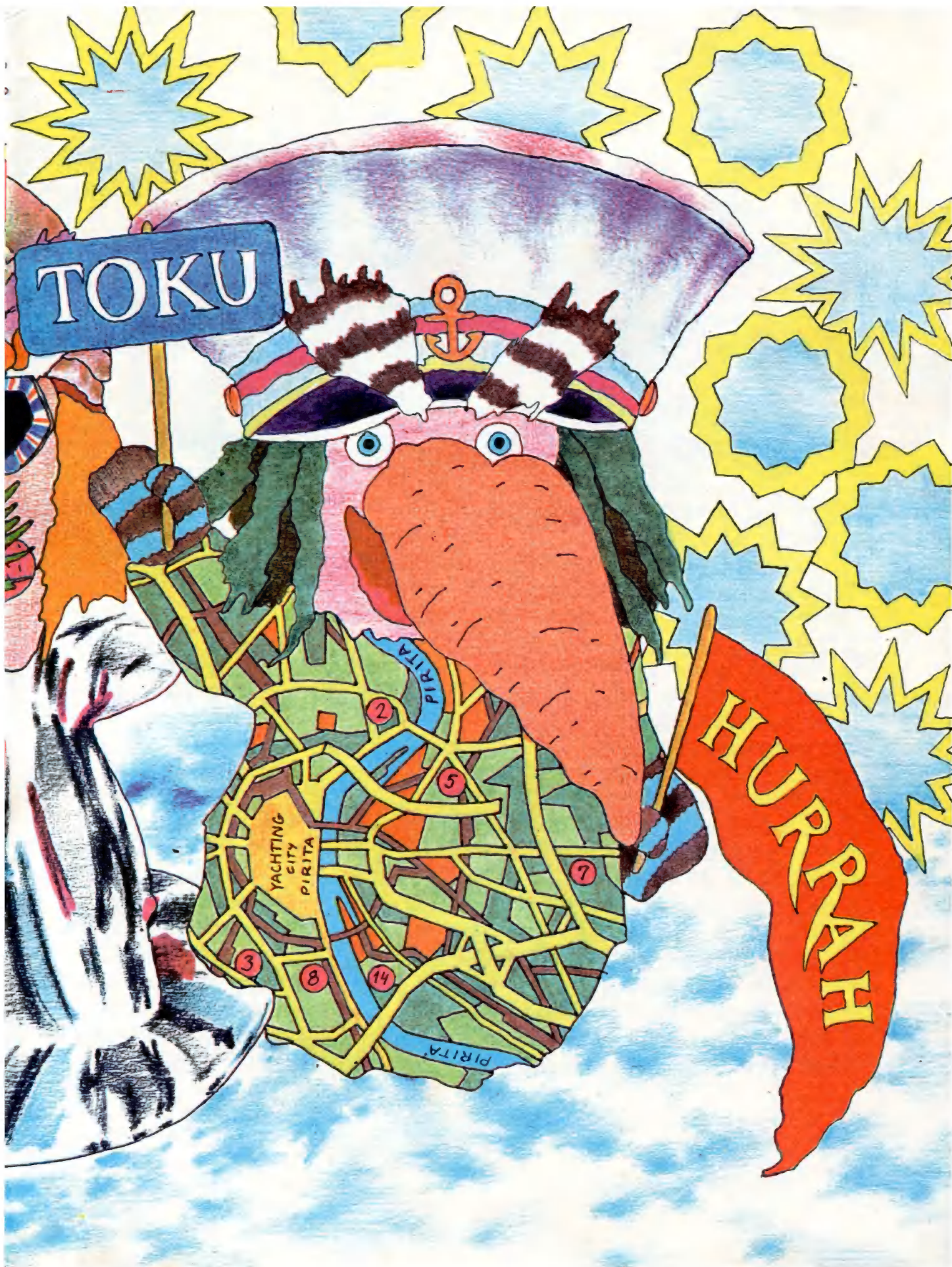
His tears were turning into icicles and rolling down the mountain-side with a gentle tinkle. More and more of them came rolling down, and the others stood watching spellbound. It was very beautiful indeed to watch Toru-Loru's frozen tears drop and roll tinkling down the slope. And Toru-Loru wept and wept and wept.

"Don't-want-to-go ho-o-ome!"

He stopped to catch his breath.









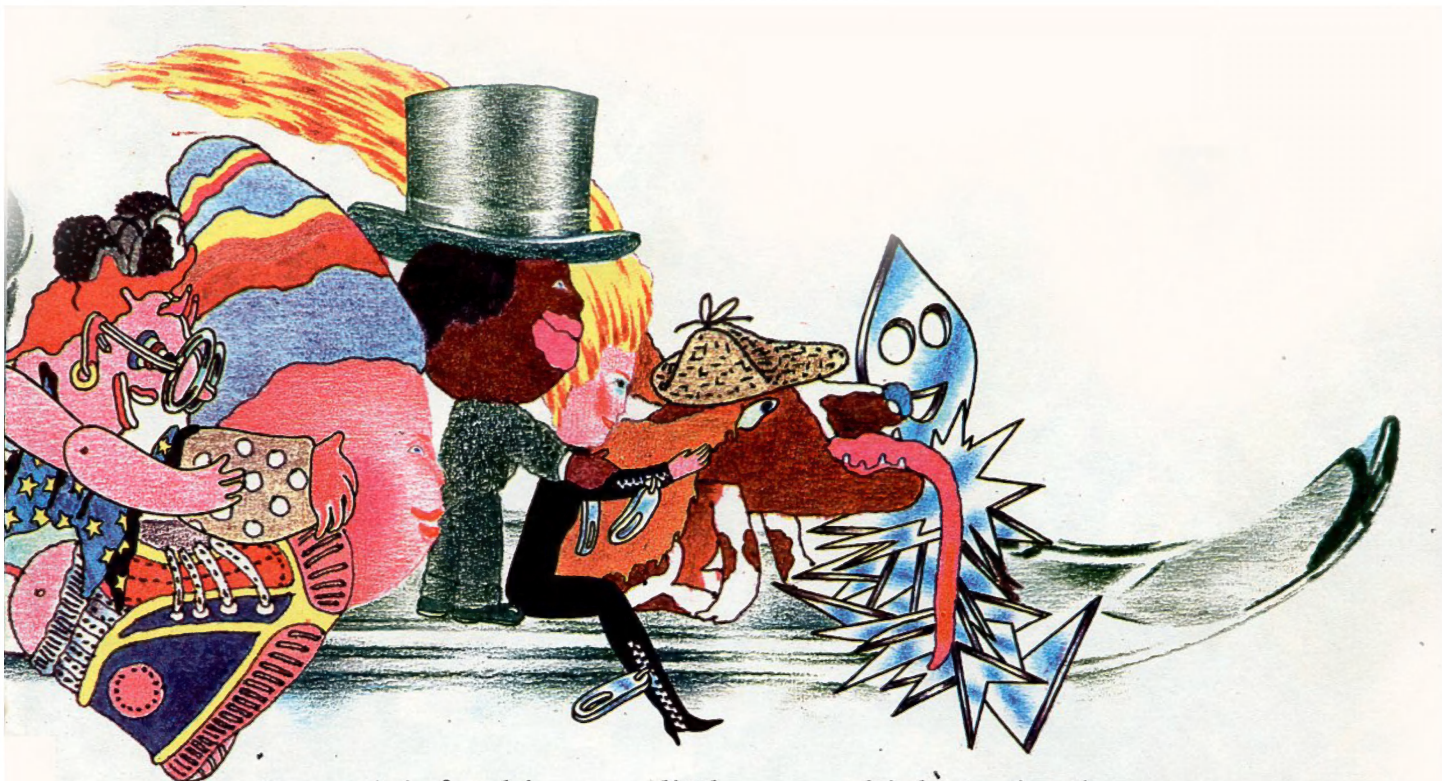
"Don't stop! What are you stopping for?" Muki cried angrily.

"It looks so lovely!"

"Don't want to wee-ee-eep!" Toru-Loru bawled. And he stopped. They were rather disappointed.

"Isn't that being obstinate!" Muki said crossly. "Now he's not going to cry for us any more! And it really was a lovely sight!" Presently the wings of the snow-mill started going round and round. Great big flakes of snow began to fall. First sparsely, then thicker and thicker, and soon the ground was all white, and the flakes continued to fall, on and on. Layer upon layer covered the earth. Ah, now it was really snowing! Snowing at last! Oh, the joy of it!

The snow-millers came running to the gate. Their long beards were spangled with snow-flakes. They were carrying something. Now, what do you think it could be? It looked very much like a small sled. And so it was—a real sled—long and slim, with a wheel and a brake. "Take it, so you can get home quickly!" said Koku. "And thanks, friends! You've saved us from the witch!" said Oku. "We'll let you have plenty of snow for sledding this winter," said Toku. They got on the sled. Albert in front, at the wheel. Then came Timbu-Limbu with Muki in her lap. Behind her was Pambu, then Toru-Loru. Pimpelsang was at the very back. He was terribly



homesick for his cozy little room high up in the tower.

And he felt he had neglected his book most awfully.

"Good-bye!" cried the tin boy Albert. And they all recalled how he used to be called Trebla and how he had come to Birchbark Castle backwards.

The sled started down the slope. The three snow-millers stood waving farewell.

Faster and faster went the sled. At every bend it whirled up clouds of white dust. The bushes had all but disappeared under the snow. But more and more snow was falling to the ground.

"Good winter-sleep to you, Hedgehog!" cried Timbu-Limbu. "Good winter-sleep to you, Little Bear!"

And already they had left those familiar places behind.

The sled continued to gather speed. It swerved round the bends whipping up clouds of snow. They had to hold on to each other with all their might.

Far behind them the enormous wings of the snow-mill turned round and round. They couldn't see them any longer through the heavy snow-fall. The snow-millers Koku, Oku, and Toku were really doing their best. Closer and closer came Birchbark Castle. And already they could see its white turrets gleaming through the thick veil of snowflakes.





